

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Proposal To Determine *Asclepias Meadii* (Mead's Milkweed) To Be Threatened Species

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: The Service proposes to list *Asclepias meadii* (Mead's milkweed), a prairie perennial, as a threatened species under the authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act). Approximately 61 populations are currently known; 40 in Kansas, 3 in Illinois, 1 in Iowa, and 17 in Missouri. The plant is believed extirpated from Indiana and Wisconsin. It is threatened by destruction and modification of the "tall grass" prairie due to agricultural expansion, urban growth, and agricultural practices detrimental to the plant's reproductive cycle. This proposal, if made final, will implement Federal protection provided by the Act for *Asclepias meadii*. Critical habitat is not being proposed. The Service seeks data and comments from the public on this proposal.

DATES: Comments from all interested parties must be received by December 21, 1987. Public hearing request must be received by December 7, 1987.

ADDRESSES: Comments and materials concerning this proposal should be sent to the Endangered Species Division, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Building, Fort Snelling, Twin Cities, Minnesota 55111. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: James M. Engel, Endangered Species Coordinator (see **ADDRESSES** section) at 612/725-3276 or FTS 725-3276.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Asclepias meadii (Mead's milkweed) was first collected by Dr. Samuel Barnum Mead in Hancock County, Illinois, in 1843, and subsequently described by John Torrey in an 1856 addendum to the second edition of *Gray's Manual of Botany* (Betz 1967).

Asclepias meadii is a perennial that usually occurs in virgin prairie as a solitary plant or as a few closely associated individuals (Kurz and Bowles 1981). Ronald McGregor (University of Kansas, pers. comm. 1985) has found *Asclepias meadii* only in tallgrass prairies. Morgan (1980) reports that Missouri populations are found in unplowed bluestem prairie in the unglaciated region of the State where the soils are deep silt loam. Betz and Hohn (1978) report that this species occurs on virgin mesic silt loam prairies and occasionally on limestone glade prairies in Missouri and southern Illinois. Betz and Hohn (1978), and Kurz and Bowles (1981) report that very few individual plants are found at any given population, with most populations containing fewer than a dozen plants. However, R. Brooks (Kansas Biological Survey, pers. comm. 1986) reports that populations in Kansas seem to average about 20 plants each. Associated species found with *Asclepias meadii* are *Sorghastrum nutans*, *Andropogon gerardii*, *Petalostemum candidum*, *Gentiana puberula*, *Ruellia humilis*, and *Silphium laciniatum* (Betz and Hohn 1978). *Platanthera praeclara* (western prairie fringed orchid), recently segregated as an allopatric species from *Platanthera leucophaea* (eastern prairie fringed orchid), and considered as a candidate for Federal listing, is also associated with *Asclepias meadii* at several locations in Kansas (Sheviak and Bowles, pers. comm. 1986).

Asclepias meadii usually commences its seasonal growth in mid to late April. It has a solitary, slender, unbranched stalk, 8-16 inches (20-40 centimeters) high, without hairs, but with a whitish,

waxy covering. The leaves are opposite, broadly ovate, 2-3 inches (5-7.5 centimeters) long, $\frac{3}{8}$ -2 inches (1-5 centimeters) broad, without hairs and also with a whitish, waxy covering. A solitary umbel at the top of a long stalk has 6-15 greenish ivory/cream colored flowers that open in late May and early June. Young green fruit pods appear by late June and reach their maximum length of 1.5-3 inches (4-8 centimeters) by late August or early September. As these pods mature they darken and the hairy seeds borne within are mature by mid October (Morgan 1980, Kurz and Bowles 1981).

Historically, *Asclepias meadii* ranged throughout much of the "tall grass" prairie. It is now restricted to 61 known sites in 21 counties within Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri. It is thought to be extirpated in Indiana and Wisconsin (Bacone *et al.* 1981, Alverson 1981). In Illinois the plant's former range of 7 counties has been reduced to 2: Ford and Saline Counties, where 2 of the 3 populations are found on public land administered by the U.S. Forest Service. The other population occurs within a railroad right-of-way (Kurz and Bowles 1981). The plants' range in Missouri, once covering 11 counties as reported by Betz and Hohn (1978), has now been reduced to 7 counties: Barton, Benton, Dade, Pettis, Polk, St. Clair, and Vernon (Morgan, pers. comm. 1986). Nine of the 17 extant Missouri populations are in public ownership. Watson (1983) reported that *Asclepias meadii* was historically known from 5 counties in Iowa, but that all had been extirpated. A recent report by Leoschke (pers. comm. 1986) reveals 1 population with one plant, on public property, in Warren County, Iowa. McGregor (pers. comm. 1985) reported 11 populations of *Asclepias meadii* in 9 Kansas counties (Anderson, Bourbon, Coffey, Douglas, Jefferson, Johnson, Franklin, Leavenworth, and Miami). Brooks (pers. comm. 1986) reports that field survey work conducted in these 9 counties, as well as Allen and Linn counties during the summer of 1986, resulted in the discovery of 29 additional populations. Only the population in Jefferson county is protected.

Federal Government actions on Mead's milkweed began with Section 12 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Act), which directed the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution to prepare a report on those plants considered to be endangered, threatened, or extinct. This report, designated as House Document No. 94-51, was presented to Congress on January 9, 1975. On July 1, 1975, the Service published a notice in the **Federal Register** (40 FR 27823) of its acceptance

of the Smithsonian Institution report as a petition within the context of section 4(c)(2) of the Act (petition acceptance is now governed by section 4(b)(3)), and of its intention to review the status of the plant taxa named within. On June 16, 1976, the Service published a proposed rule in the **Federal Register** (41 FR 24523) to determine approximately 1,700 vascular plant species to be endangered species pursuant to section 4 of the Act. The list of 1,700 plant taxa was assembled on the basis of comments and data received by the Smithsonian Institution and the Service in response to House Document No. 94-51 and the July 1, 1975, **Federal Register** publication. *Asclepias meadii* (Mead's milkweed) was included in the July 1, 1975, notice of review and the June 16, 1976, proposal. General comments received in relation to the 1976 proposal were summarized in the **Federal Register** on April 26, 1978 (43 FR 17909). On December 10, 1979, the Service published a notice (44 FR 70796) withdrawing the portion of the June 16, 1976, proposal that had not been made final, along with four other proposals that had expired due to a procedural requirement of the 1978 amendments to the Act. On December 15, 1980, the Service published a revised notice of review for native plants in the **Federal Register**. *Asclepias meadii* was included in that notice as a category 1 species. Category 1 species are those for which data in the Service's possession indicate that proposing to list is warranted. On September 27, 1985 (50 FR 39525), the Service again published a revised notice for native plants in the **Federal Register**; *Asclepias meadii* was included in that notice as a category 2 species. Category 2 species are those for which the Service believes additional data must be obtained before a proposal to list is warranted. Status information received since the September 27, 1985 (50 FR 39525), notice indicates that proposing to list *Asclepias meadii* as a threatened species is warranted.

Summary of Factors Affecting the Species

Section 4(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and regulations (50 CFR Part 424) promulgated to implement the listing provisions of the Act set forth the procedures for adding species to the Federal Lists. A species may be determined to be endangered or threatened due to one or more of the five factors described in section 4(a)(1). These factors and their application to *Asclepias meadii* Torr. (Mead's milkweed) are as follows:

A. *The present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range.* *Asclepias meadii* is threatened by the elimination of its "tall grass" prairie habitat due to urban development, agricultural expansion, and detrimental agricultural practices. McGregor (pers. comm. 1985) reports that over the last 40 years he has observed the slow elimination of prairie hay meadows through plowing, conversion to grazing, and development. Betz and Hohn (1978) also note that prairie hay meadows are being plowed and put into grain crops; even those hay meadows remaining are mowed once or twice each year before *Asclepias meadii* plants are able to set seeds. McGregor (pers. comm. 1985) also reports that yearly mowing of these tallgrass prairies where *Asclepias meadii* is found severely restricts the plant's reproduction and any chance for increased distribution. Kurz and Bowles (1981) report that *Asclepias meadii* populations occurring within railroad rights-of-way in Ford County, Illinois, are threatened by erosion, lack of fire, and use of herbicides and plowing, while the populations in Salin County are threatened by encroachment of woody vegetation and trampling by hikers. McGregor (pers. comm. 1985) reports that one of the best Kansas populations, the one in which Brooks counted 800-1,000 plants in 1985, is in an area certain to be developed for housing in the next few years.

B. *Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific or educational purposes.* Commercial trade of this plant is not known to exist, but collection could reduce populations in more accessible sites.

C. *Disease or predation.* McGregor (pers. comm. 1985) reports that it is not unusual to find aerial portions of *Asclepias meadii* plants suddenly wilting and dying because of infestation of a beetle larva (Curculionidae) in the stalk. McGregor (pers. comm. 1985) also notes that other insects puncture the peduncle, killing the inflorescence just at the blooming period. Betz and Hohn (1978) report that the larvae of *Tetraopes femoratus* are destructive to the small root system of *Asclepias meadii*, but not to larger milkweeds such as *Asclepias syriaca* and *Asclepias sullivantii*, which seem to tolerate more infestation than *Asclepias meadii*.

D. *The inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms.* *Asclepias meadii* is officially listed as endangered by the States of Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. Kansas does not have specific legislation or rules to protect endangered or threatened plants. Illinois

law protects those endangered and threatened plants found on State property and prohibits taking State endangered plants without written permission of the landowner; it also prohibits sale of State endangered plants. State permits are required for taking or possessing Federal endangered plants. Iowa regulations prohibit removal, possession, and sale of any plant species on the Federal or State lists. The Missouri regulations prohibit exportation, transportation, or sale of plants on the State or Federal lists; collecting, digging, or picking any rare or endangered plant without permission of the property owner is prohibited. Although *Asclepias meadii* is offered various forms of protection under these State laws, monitoring and enforcement are difficult due to limited personnel. While approximately 28% of the known populations of *Asclepias meadii* are located on public lands and receive some form of protection, the majority of the known populations are, as yet, unprotected. The Endangered Species Act offers possibilities for additional protection of this taxon through section 6 by cooperation between the States and the Service, and through section 7 (interagency cooperation) requirements. The Endangered Species Act would afford additional protection to *Asclepias meadii*.

E. *Other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence.* Betz and Hohn (1978) report that the low number of individual plants at any one site do not attract potential pollinators, and this factor is possibly the cause for low reproductive success. Betz and Hohn (1978) also report that studies at the Morton Arboretum indicate that five to eight years are necessary for plants to mature from seed. McGregor reports that Kansas populations of *Asclepias meadii* tend to have larger numbers of plants in some years and fewer in others. Betz and Hohn (1978) also observe that individual plants produce flowers for two or three years and then rest, and in some cases completely disappear for a few years. Research is needed to better understand this fluctuation phenomenon in order to maintain and promote the species.

The Service has carefully assessed the best scientific and commercial information available regarding the past, present, and future threats faced by this species in determining to propose this rule. Based on this evaluation, the preferred action is to list *Asclepias meadii* as threatened. Sixty-one populations of this species are known to exist. Over 70% of these populations are on privately owned property and receive

no protection or management designed to enhance the species' continued existence. Threatened status is appropriate because without protection and further research this species will continue to be vulnerable. For reasons detailed below, it is not considered prudent to propose designation of critical habitat.

Critical Habitat

Section 4(a)(3) of the Act, as amended, requires that to the maximum extent prudent and determinable, the Secretary designate any habitat of a species that is considered to be critical habitat at the time the species is determined to be endangered or threatened. The designation of critical habitat is not considered to be prudent when such designation would not be of net benefit to the species involved (50 CFR 424.12). The Service believes that designation of critical habitat for *Asclepias meadii* would not be prudent because no benefit to the species can be identified that would outweigh the potential threat of vandalism or collection, which might be exacerbated by the publication of a detailed critical habitat map.

Available Conservation Measures

Conservation measures provided to species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act include recognition, recovery actions, requirements for Federal protection, and prohibitions against certain practices. Recognition through listing encourages and results in conservation actions by Federal, State, and private agencies, groups, and individuals. The Endangered Species Act provides for possible land acquisition, if necessary, and cooperation with the States. It also requires that recovery actions be carried out for all listed species. Such actions are initiated by the Service following the listing. The protection required of Federal agencies and the prohibitions against collecting are discussed, in part, below.

Section 7(a) of the Act, as amended, requires Federal agencies to evaluate their actions with respect to any species that is proposed or listed as endangered or threatened and with respect to its critical habitat, if any is being designated. Regulations implementing this interagency cooperation provision of the Act are codified at 50 CFR Part 402. Section 7(a)(4) requires Federal agencies to confer informally with the Service on any action that is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed species or result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed

critical habitat. If a species is listed subsequently, section 7(a)(2) requires Federal agencies to ensure that activities they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of such a species or to destroy or adversely modify its critical habitat. If a Federal action may affect a listed species, the responsible Federal agency must enter into formal consultation with the Service.

The U.S. Forest Service has jurisdiction over the *Asclepias meadii* population in Saline County, Illinois. Federal activities that could affect the species and its habitat in the future could include forest management practices and recreational and interpretative development. It has been the experience of the Service that the majority of section 7 consultations are resolved so that the species is protected and the project can continue.

The Act and its implementing regulations found at 50 CFR 17.71 and 17.72 set forth a series of general trade prohibitions and exceptions that apply to all threatened plant species. These prohibitions, in part, make it illegal for any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to import or export any threatened plant, transport it in interstate or foreign commerce in the course of a commercial activity, sell or offer it for sale in interstate or foreign commerce, or remove it from areas under Federal jurisdiction and reduce it to possession. Seeds from cultivated specimens are exempt from these prohibitions provided that a statement of "cultivated origin" appears on their containers. Certain exceptions apply to agents of the Service and State conservation agencies. The Act and 50 CFR 17.72 also provide for the issuance of permits to carry out otherwise prohibited activities involving endangered species under certain circumstances. International and interstate commerce in *Asclepias meadii* is not known to exist. It is anticipated that few trade permits would ever be sought or issued since this plant is not common in cultivation or in the wild. Requests for copies of the regulations on plants and inquiries regarding them may be addressed to the Federal Wildlife Permit Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, DC 20240 (703/235-1935).

Public Comments Solicited

The Service intends that any final rule adopted will be accurate and as effective as possible in the conservation of endangered and threatened species. Therefore, any comments or suggestions from the public, other concerned governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested party concerning any aspect of this proposal, are hereby solicited. Comments particularly are sought concerning the following:

- (1) Biological, commercial trade, or other relevant data concerning any threat (or lack thereof) to *Asclepias meadii*;
- (2) The location of any additional populations of *Asclepias meadii* and the reasons why any habitat of this species should or should not be determined to be critical habitat as provided by section 4 of the Act;
- (3) Additional information concerning the range and distribution of this species; and
- (4) Current or planned activities in the subject area and the possible impacts on *Asclepias meadii*.

Final promulgation of a regulation on *Asclepias meadii* will take into consideration the comments and any additional information received by the Service, and such communications may lead to adoption of a final regulation that differs from this proposal.

The Endangered Species Act provides for a public hearing on this proposal, if one is requested. Requests must be filed within 45 days of the date of the proposal. Such requests must be made in writing and addressed to the Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Building, Fort Snelling, Twin Cities, Minnesota 55111.

National Environmental Policy Act

The Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that an Environmental Assessment, as defined under the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, need not be prepared in connection with regulations adopted pursuant to section 4(a) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The reasons for this determination were published in the **Federal Register** on October 25, 1983 (48 FR 49244).

References Cited

- Alverson, W.S. 1981. Status report on *Asclepias meadii*. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Unpubl. ms. 4 pp.
- Bacone, J.A., Crovello, T.J., and Hauser, L.A. 1981. Status report on *Asclepias meadii*. Indiana Department of Conservation. Unpubl. ms. 10 pp.
- Betz, R.F. 1967. The ecology of *Asclepias*, especially *Asclepias meadii* Torrey, and a study of the factors contributing to its possible extinction as a wild plant. A Research proposal to the National Science Foundation. Washington, DC.
- Betz, R.F. and Hohn, J.E. 1978. Status report for *Asclepias meadii* Torr. prepared for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 9 pp.
- Kurz, D.R. and Bowles, M.L. 1981. Report on the status of Illinois vascular plants potentially endangered or threatened in the United States. Natural Land Institute, Rockford, Illinois. Unpubl. ms. 10 pp.
- Morgan, S.W. 1980. Status report on *Asclepias meadii*. Missouri Department of Conservation. Unpubl. ms. 15 pp.
- Watson, W.C. 1983. Status report of *Asclepias meadii*. Iowa Conservation Commission. Unpubl. ms. 11 pp.

Author

The primary author of this rule is William F. Harrison (see **ADDRESSES** section) (612/725-3276 or FTS 725-3276).

List of Subjects in 50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and threatened wildlife, Fish, Marine mammals, Plants (agriculture).

Accordingly, it is hereby proposed to amend Part 17, Subchapter B of Chapter I, Title 50 of the Code of Federal Regulations, as set forth below:

PART 17—[AMENDED]

1. The authority citation for Part 17 continues to read as follows:

Authority: Pub. L. 93-205, 87 Stat. 884; Pub. L. 94-359, 90 Stat. 911; Pub. L. 95-632, 92 Stat. 3751; Pub. L. 96-159, 93 Stat. 1225; Pub. L. 97-304, 96 Stat. 1411 (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

2. It is proposed to amend § 17.12(h) by adding the following, in alphabetical order under the family Asclepiadaceae, to the List of Endangered and Threatened Plants:

§ 17.12 Endangered and threatened plants.

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(h) * * *

Species			Historic range	Status	When listed	Critical habitat	Special rules
Scientific name	Common name						
Asclepiadaceae—Milkweed family:							
Asclepias meadii	Mead's milkweed	U.S.A. (IL, IN, IA, KS, MO, WI)	T			NA	NA